

**Childhood Overweight and Obesity**  
**A *Future of Children* journal seminar**  
**WWS 594j**  
**Spring 2005**  
**Thursday, 1:00-4:00 pm**  
**Robertson 035**

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**Reading Materials Required:**

- Reading Packet, Pequod
- Rough drafts found at a conference website (information handed out at first class)

**Description of Class:**

As the media has documented repeatedly, the United States is facing an obesity epidemic: Americans are gaining weight in unprecedented numbers. Currently, two-thirds of adults are overweight, as defined as 25-29 BMI, and a full 30.5 percent are obese, as defined as a BMI over 30. The result has been an increase in the conditions that accompany unhealthy weight gain: cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes, gallbladder disease and injuries related to unhealthy weight. Not only do individuals suffer, but society as a whole is hurt as insurance premiums rise to cover these costs, work productivity is lost, and medical costs escalate.

The rise in overweight and obesity has not been limited to adults. Children too are gaining weight as never before; currently 15 percent of children are overweight and another 15 percent are likely to be so in the future. Heavy children usually grow up to be overweight adults and face the health conditions mentioned above. Moreover, more and more children are presenting with diseases previously limited to adults -- for example, type II diabetes, previously referred to as "adult onset diabetes," has been seen in children as young as age eight. While their health conditions mirror the adults, policies and interventions to prevent and treat obesity in children do not.

Thus *The Future of Children*, a leading publication on children's policy in the United States, plans to cover the topic of childhood obesity in an upcoming volume. This course is being offered in conjunction with the journal, which is published by the Woodrow Wilson School in partnership with the Brookings Institution. As part of this course, students will actively participate in a two-day rough draft authors' conference on childhood overweight and obesity on April 28-29, 2005.

During the five weeks preceding the conference, we will examine the causes and consequences of the increase in children's obesity, as well as some policy solutions to this problem. We will examine ways that different policy areas converge – education,

parenting, community and industry regulation, and urban planning – in the attempt to find solutions to this problem. This course counts towards the Certificate in Health and Health Policy.

**Description of Paper:** Students will write one (15 page) paper, which can follow either format:

1. A review of two of the papers submitted at the conference. In this review, students will critique the papers for content and style. In doing so, they will answer the following questions: 1) Is the paper accurate? Does the research support the findings? 2) Is it balanced? Does it present all the evidence and sides of the argument fairly? 3) Is it comprehensive? Is there other research that exists that the author missed? 4) Does the paper differentiate between the good research and the bad? Does it weed through all the evidence and present the reader with the best research possible? 5) Can the chapter educate a wide audience? Has it met the journal's goal of translating top quality research into accessible information? At the end of the day, can we say what works and what doesn't work?
2. A short research paper on a topic relating to childhood obesity that is not covered in the journal volume. This paper should be a shortened version of what we are asking from the commissioned authors – a literature review of a topic that affects childhood obesity.

**Grades:** The overall grade for each student will be weighted as follows:

70% Paper  
30% Class Participation

## SYLLABUS

### **Class 1. Thursday, March 24, 2005**

**Introduction:** Organization of Course, *The Future of Children* volume on Childhood Overweight and Obesity

**Lecture:** Trends and Possible Explanations for Childhood Overweight and Obesity

### **Video and Discussion**

### **Class 2. Thursday, March 31, 2005**

**Lecture:** Do we have an epidemic? Where we are today and where should we be headed?

**Reading:**

- Chapters 1-4 of the IOM Report
- “The Public Health Impact of Obesity,” Tommy LS Vissler and Jacob C. Seidell, *Annu. Rev. Public Health* 2001
- “Childhood Obesity: What we can learn from Existing Data on Societal Trends,” Roland Sturm, RAND

**Class 3. Thursday, April 7, 2005**

**Lecture:** The Role of Industry and Communities in Childhood Overweight and Obesity

**Reading:**

- Chapters 5-6 of the IOM Report
- “Minisymposium on Obesity: Overview and Some Strategic Considerations,” Shiriki Kumanyika, *Annu. Rev. Public Health* 2001
- Brownell and Warner rough draft
- Sallis rough draft

**Class 4. Thursday, April 14, 2005**

**Lecture:** The Role of Schools in Childhood Overweight and Obesity

**Reading:**

- Chapter 7 of the IOM Report
- “Healthy Schools for Healthy Kids,” Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Story and French rough draft

**Class 5. Thursday, April 21, 2005**

**Lecture:** The Role of the Home in Childhood Overweight and Obesity  
and Next Steps for Action and Research

**Reading:**

- Chapters 8-9 of the IOM Report
- “Environmental Influences on Eating and Physical Activity,” Simone French, Mary Story and Robert Jeffrey, *Annu. Rev. Public Health* 2001
- Lindsay et al. rough draft
- Kuminyake rough draft

**Class 6. ROUGH DRAFT AUTHORS’ CONFERENCE**

**April 28, 2005, 2-6:30 pm (dinner optional)**

**April 29, 2005, 9-4:30 pm**

Attendance mandatory; Students will be asked to take notes at the conference

**Reading:**

- Butcher/Anderson rough draft
- Caprio rough draft
- (Any other rough drafts not previously read)